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The Jesuits of the Agusan River, 1875-1935¹

FRANCISCO R. DEMETRIO, S.J. trans.

These brief notes are written so that the work of the Society of Jesus in this part of Mindanao may not be forgotten² now that the Superiors of the Society have decided to hand over the mission of Agusan to the Missionary Fathers of the Sacred Heart who administer the neighboring province of Surigao.³

The sources for these pages can be found in the published volumes of the *Letters of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus of the Philippine Mission*, as well as Fr. Pablo Pastells' *History of the*

1. This document comprising fifteen typewritten pages, the first thirteen pages doublespaced, the last two singlespaced, is titled in Spanish "MISION DEL RIO AGUSAN 1875-1935." It is on ordinary sized bond paper, stapled on the upper side, yellowed with age and frayed at the edges; the last two pages, i.e., pages 14 and 15, are badly battered. However the text is for the most part clearly legible, with handwritten corrections and accents in india ink.

This manuscript came into the hands of the present translator some seven or eight years ago when the Socius to the Jesuit Provincial in the Philippines, Father Hernando Maceda, gave it to him for the Xavier Folklife Archives where it has been filed. On the occasion of the quadricentennial celebration of the coming of the Jesuits to the Philippines, the translator thought it worthwhile to publish it in English translation, for it sheds some light on a still unwritten portion of the Philippine Jesuit history.

2. The writer of these notes is not identified. From internal evidence, however, it is probable that he was one of the missionaries who had worked in the Agusan region for some time and might have been even one among those who were last to leave. His animadversions on the conditions in Agusan at the time the mission changed hands, especially in the fourth part, show that he had intimate knowledge of Agusan. The translator suspects that he may be Fr. Buxo himself. This is only conjecture, however.

3. The MSC Fathers had taken over the administration of the Province of Surigao earlier in 1908. See A.H. van Odijk, MSC, *History of the Christianization of the Dioceses of Surigao and Butuan*, trans. Teodulfo Vrakking, O. Carm. (Cagayan de Oro: Xavier University Museum and Archives Publication No. 16, 1973), p. 1. Fr. Vrakking in his Postscript to the *History* which is comprised under Appendix I, specifies the arrival of the first MSC Fathers in Surigao as 12 December 1908 (*ibid.*, p. 163).

Philippine Mission.⁴ But because these materials are scattered through various volumes, there is danger that the thread of the story be lost and the reader not be given an adequate notion of the magnitude of the enterprise which the Jesuit Fathers, worthy emulators of the most illustrious men of the Society, undertook with such great zeal and success.

For the sake both of briefness and clarity, we shall divide this short paper into [four] parts. First, the state of the Agusan mission when the Jesuits took over [from the Recollects]: second, the period of the *conquista* [or work of conversion]; third, the work of consolidation, the Revolution and its aftermath; and finally, the period after the Revolution and the handing over of the mission [to the Missionary Fathers of the Sacred Heart]

[PART ONE: AGUSAN AT THE TIME THE JESUITS TOOK OVER]

We read in the history of the old Society [in the Philippines] that in 1596 Frs. Valerio de Ledesma and Manuel Martinez opened the mission of Butuan.⁵ To them is due the glory of having converted the chieftains Silongan, Elian and others. But it was the worthy Recollect Fathers [Recollect Fathers of Saint Augustine] who with immense zeal tilled the vast field of Agusan for over two hundred years.⁶ [On the coast] they established the parish of Butuan in 1622 and, in 1850, the parish of Linao or Bunauan in the interior.

4. See *Cartas de los Padres de la Compañía de Jesus de la Mision de Filipinas*, (10 vols. 1875-1895) and Pablo Pastells, S.J., *Mision de la Compañía de Jesus de Filipinas en el siglo XIX* (3 vols., 1916-1917); and also Fr. van Odiijk's *History*, which should be recognized as a seriously written testament to the magnitude of the work of the Society of Jesus in Agusan. What makes his *History* rather unique is that the writer is not a Jesuit, but a member of the MSC Congregation which succeeded the Jesuits in Agusan in 1935. The Preface of Fr. Vrakking who translated the *History* clearly acknowledges the debt of the later missionaries to the earlier ones, namely, the Recollects and the Jesuits. (*Ibid.*, translator's Preface).

5. H. de la Costa, S.J., *The Jesuits in the Philippines 1581-1768* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 165.

6. More accurately, the Recollects labored in the Third District of Mindanao, the Caraga District (the present provinces of Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Surigao del Norte, Surigao del Sur, and Davao del Norte) for 250 years, from 1622 to 1875. Of the 251 Recollects who worked in Caraga as missionaries, 50 died in the district. (Cf. van Odiijk, *History*, pp. 56-57; see also Fr. Licinio Ruiz, ORSA, *Sinopsis Historica de la Provincia de San Nicolas de Tolentino de las Islas Filipinas de la Orden de Agustinos Descalzos* (Manila, 1925), 1: 171ff.

These two parishes the Jesuits took over. In February 1875 Fr. Ramon Pamies succeeded [the Recollect] Fray Garcia [in Butuan]. And on the 16 March of the same year, Fr. Domingo Bove became the parish priest of Bunauan. The parish of Butuan comprised Nasipit, Tubay and Guigoog⁷ with a total of some 5,569 Christians, while the parish of Bunauan included Talacogon, Suribao, and San Juan which they wanted to call "Reunion."⁸

When the administration of the Agusan Valley passed to the Fathers of the Society [of Jesus] of the [Philippine] Mission, its condition was indeed discouraging. And when they began the reduction and Christianization of its inhabitants, the pagan Manobo and Mandaya, the Jesuits could not remain indifferent in the face of the bloody events which took place one after the other⁹ These killings were a barrier to civilization which seemed not to have discovered these lands for almost three centuries.

In 1856 the Governor of the Province, Sr. Salazar, ordered the Manobo to come together in towns along the banks of the river. Afterwards when they had dispersed, Governor Boscana repeated the order in 1867 and the Manobo obeyed. Thus, at the time of the coming of the Jesuits there were in lower, central, and upper Agusan, reductions of some twenty houses each. But although

7. *Guigoog* is, I think Gingoog, now a city in Misamis Oriental. It had been an outstation to Butuan since 1750. Cf. van Odiijk, *History*, p. 45.

8. The famous "Reunion of Cabadbaran." In 1867 by government decree the inhabitants of Talacogon, Bunauan and the surrounding areas were ordered to move to the coast. They were meant to form a village near Cabadbaran. This plan was opposed both by the Manobo and the Jesuits. For it would have meant that the people of the interior would have to leave land, plantations, and fields and begin to eke out an existence on new land, with forests still to be cleared, far from their native habitat. Because of the intense opposition on the part of the missionaries, the decree was revoked in 1879. Fr. Peruga, one of the missionaries working in that area, called it the "infernal reunion." See van Odiijk, *History*, pp. 71-72.

9. Concerning the frequency of murders and vendetta among the Manobo and the Mandaya, the *Cartas* are an abundant source. Fr. Urios in *Cartas VI 136 and 156* says when speaking of the establishment of reductions among them: "Finally, it should be remembered that prior to our arrival, there was not one hamlet that was not at war with some other one. . . ." Fr. Peruga in 1877 writes: "The Manobos fight and kill each other in the most cruel and outrageous manner. Not a day passes that victims or their relatives do not call upon the missionary for help. Yesterday, three Manobo were killed and one seriously wounded on the Simulao river, although only six days ago Fr. Bove had induced them to give up their murderous plans." Fr. Bove in the same year says that "a month ago the wife of the capitan of Casilayan river district died; in his grief he killed one of his slaves, for no cause. In revenge, a brother of that slave killed another slave of the capitan. In turn the capitan killed a third one, so that at this moment everybody in the hamlet is scared, and many have fled. . . ." See van Odiijk, *History*, p. 61.

they observed good conduct with the Spanish authorities and obeyed their orders, as soon as the garrison of Linao was transferred to Davao, the pagan inhabitants of this region were in continual warfare with one another,

Fr. [Martin] Luengo¹⁰ (*History*, 1: 162) relates something of the happenings in central Agusan between the years 1874 and 1876. Let us listen to his words: "In Bajay, a son of Capitan Ma-butan murdered Ybou, brother of Bujayan." And again: "In Agusan on 13 February 1874, Babug, Lubagnon and other assassins killed Mibagnon and thirteen others; they took another thirteen captives." [Further on he writes],

In July of the same year, 1874, 200 Manobo from Cateel killed 117 persons in that rancheria. In November of the same year, Mandajay of Bajayan, along with his companions killed six Manobo from Maasin, and when I made my visitation their skeletons were still unburied in their abandoned houses. [And yet again] In the past year, 1875, there were assassinations in Simulao, in Humayan, in Bajay, where the famous bagani Acag killed six persons. While I was in Bunauan he wanted to repeat these murders by killing the rest of that unfortunate family, but they got ahead of him and he was transfixed with a spear.

Even as I write, the blood of a Manobo flows freely who has been badly wounded by his enemies after they murdered his wife, his three sons and the wives of two of them, and kidnapped four of his younger children. This is what is reported to me by Fr. Bové who is tending the wounds of that man's body while at the same time he spreads the balm of religion over his wounded soul.

These human sacrifices may be traced back to various causes: personal vendetta; the desire to have a wife, and, because of the demands of the girl's parents, the easy way out is obtaining it forcibly; also the need to acquire slaves to pay off debts, and the desire to increase one's wealth by having a good number of slaves.¹¹

Another difficulty when the Jesuits assumed charge of central Agusan was the fact that those who had been Christianized were generally widely dispersed and there was need to reunite them once again. Bunauan had under its jurisdiction the three groups of

10. According to Fr. van Odijk, Fr. Martin Luengo was the first Jesuit in Agusan after the departure of the Recollects. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

11. Fr. van Odijk (p. 64 ff) gives a further description of the causes for slave-taking in Agusan.

Talacogon, Suribao and San Juan de Suribao which were all far removed from the residence of the missionary, because of the situation in which these groups were, with the men practically forced to go to Cabadbaran, while the women and their families remained on their original lands. In the towns there was neither a church, nor a parish house, nor a school, nor decent houses, nor industry, nor commerce. And worse, they were without [the consolations of] religion, and were starving.

[PART TWO] THE CONQUISTA [OR CONVERSION]: THE MISSIONARY IN BUNAUAN

When the missionary found himself surrounded by so many pagans, he endeavored to teach catechism to the recently converted. These in turn served as catechists among their own people. Through this manner of proceeding and by his frequent visits to various places, Fr. Domingo Bové was able to baptize some 209 persons in the Bunauan mission from his arrival until 1 May 1876. (*History*, 1:170).

At the same time in Butuan, Fr. Ramon Pamies gave himself wholeheartedly to parish work. He was so successful that in piety Butuan yields to no other town in Mindanao. That holy man of God brought forth these fruits because of the pious practices he introduced and fostered while he acted as parish priest of Butuan for nine years. He molded Butuan in Christian fashion so that attendance at daily Mass was common among those who lived in the *poblacion*.

On 6 February 1879, Fr. Saturnino Urios¹² rightly called "the Apostle of Agusan," arrived [in Butuan]. The qualities which adorned the soul of Fr. Urios for the conversion of the pagans were extraordinary: his zeal for the glory of God goaded him to undertake his apostolic forays through the region of Agusan in the midst of perils and great hardships; his facility for learning the languages of the native people and his ability to imitate them in conversation were a great attraction to them

12. Fr. Saturnino Urios first arrived in Surigao in 1874. Together with Fr. Gregorio Parache of Bislig, he gave missions in Cateel, Baganga, Hinatuan, and Bislig in 1875. He evangelized Butuan from 1875 to 1892 when he was transferred to Sumilao in Bukidnon, and again from 1901 to 1916. He was a missionary for forty-one years. He travelled all over Agusan and Davao. See van Odijk, *History*, pp. 77 f.

and won over the savage *bagani*. Before engaging in the arduous work of conversion, he conducted an eight day mission in the town of Butuan. Tears flowed freely during the mission, restitutions were made and marriages were validated; but above all, he prepared the leaders for the help which they were to give him in his apostolic ventures.

On 12 April of the same year [1889], Fr. Urios wrote to his Superior Fr. Heras, that a hundred Manobo had presented themselves to him who formed the crew of twenty-seven armed boats. Among them were the famous assassins Mancajulilay and Manjumugud who were the terror of that region and bitterly hostile to each other. In this first visit he won their hearts when he told them that they were his sons and that he had come in order to live and die among them. Kneeling down, the two were reconciled with each other. Fr. Urios blessed them, fixing his eyes on heaven and asking the Lord for abundant graces for the project he had begun: to give new birth in Christ to these people and to place them beneath the folds of the flag of the fatherland.

Fr. Urios went up the Agusan with its deep waters, remaining for two days with each group. He succeeded in bringing together the principal *datus* in Las Nieves, a day's journey from Butuan, where he left a pure-blooded Manobo, formerly a notorious murderer, as *gobernadorcillo*. In the [valley of the] Ujut which empties into the Agusan, he founded the town of Remedios where some 1000 people of savage and fiery character banded together. At the mouth of the river Uaua he established the town of Esperanza; further upriver he founded Guadalupe; and four leagues from this *poblacion*, at the juncture of the rivers Casilayan and Agusan, he founded San Luis.

In the Simulao river he baptized the subjects of the *bagani* Maligaan, assisted by the latter's son Pablo and his wife Filomena whom he had sought out in Bislig in order that they might prepare their relatives. In upper Agusan he also baptized the Mandaya in Gandia and the arrogant followers of Mamat in Moncayo. Along the banks of the same Agusan river about two hours distance from Moncayo, he chose Játiva as the mission station. After the annexation of the *rancherías* of San Vicente and San Ignacio to Butuan, and of those in their vicinity to Bunauan and Nasipit, he chose Bunauan as the center of apostolic efforts [among the Mandaya].

Along the Simulao river he brought together those who were being baptized there numbering about 2000. The beautiful town of Loreto was founded along the Humayan with more than 700 inhabitants. Along the Argauan, he gathered in La Paz the people whom Frs. Bové and Peruga had baptized in three groups. Along the Suribao, he established Novelé, comprising both the Manobo and Mandaya people of the same river and of the hinterlands [ilayas] of Ginatuan, of San Juan, and Loyola. Thus the year 1880 came to a close with 6955 new Christians in the Agusan Valley. All submitted themselves to the authority of the Father, even the notorious [bagani] of the Manat river. They established the town of Gandia where on 11 January 1881 Cayetano and Ambalon were baptized with more than 300 Mandaya. Afterwards the group which was called Clavijo was separated.

God sent illustrious men as co-operators of Fr. Urios in the task of converting those people who have immortalized their names. Frs. Heras, Canudas and Terricabras, urged on by their apostolic spirit, continued to mold those new Christian communities through their frequent visits, through instructions in the truths of our holy faith and, above all, by their patience in bearing up with the crudities of those who only a short while ago had emerged from the forests.

Fr. Canudas went into the settlements along the Gibong river from Talacogon. He baptized in various places like Concepcion and Gracia. The town of Trento was consolidated, as were the towns of Cuevas and Tudela, with the barrios attached to Bunauan, San Jose and San Isidro. These latter places no longer seemed like new Christian settlements, for in their customs and way of life as well as in speaking Bisayan they could match the old Christians. The missionaries did not hesitate to administer the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist to them. There were other factors contributory in no small way to the progress of this very important mission: the fulfillment of the Easter duty, the patronal fiestas, the visits to the newly formed schools directed by reliable Christian families of the civilly-erected towns, families the Fathers had placed over these schools as inspectors.

As an example of what was being done, let me transcribe a passage from a letter of Fr. Canudas written on 1 December 1881

to the Rev. Father Superior of the Mission (*Cartas IV*, 185). [He writes] :

We have just ended another campaign: Fr. Urios working in the lower Agusan, Fr. Terricabras in the upper and myself in the middle Agusan. We visited all the converted towns where we baptized, married and preached, etc. Everywhere we tried to strengthen them and bring about both their temporal and spiritual growth. We place our fondest hopes in the schools. In praise of them, I should say that in the five towns just visited, Las Navas, La Paz and Sagunto have filled me with satisfaction to see that many know the whole catechism well there, as well as the mysteries of the Rosary, and some even know how to read. They sing different songs quite well. I gave prizes such as pieces of clothing and other things to all who deserved them.

Again later on [he continues] :

We have just left the celebration of the feast of St. Stanislaus, the principal one in Talacogon. The fiesta was celebrated with all possible solemnity. The church was filled with Christians, both old and newly converted. On the day following the fiesta, public examinations were held in the same church. The examinees were children, not only from the schools in the town, that is, children of old Christians, but also children from the various towns of new Christians.

Fr. Heras speaking of the same fiesta in his letter dated 27 November of the same year [1883] says:

After the fluvial procession the new converts from the various towns were examined. Prizes were distributed according to the marks they received. The girls from Guadalupe replied very well to all the catechism [questions]. It was announced that every year there would be public examinations and scholastic competitions between the new and old Christians. The teachers were encouraged to take up earnestly the task of forming the Manobo youth. The schools of Sagunto and Guadalupe were declared champions of the literary competition.

My purpose in calling together and inviting all the towns and *visitas* of Talacogon to the fiesta and inauguration of the church was accomplished: [namely], to encourage the boys and girls of the schools of the converted towns and to make them lay aside their fear by means of the Manobo music and dances and those of the moro-moro. And, above all, to give importance to the *principalia* of the newly converted towns in the presence of the old Christians. Immediately, they requested the celebration of fiestas in their towns. And in order to make them happy, I went down to Butuan with the intention, among others, of picking out three or four musicians who would accompany the missionary priest

through the various towns where they would celebrate the fiesta of their patron saint during harvest time.

What is said about the fiesta of Talacogon was repeated in Buna-uan, in Játiva, and in Veruela when the missionaries stationed themselves in these last two towns where the new Christians vied with one another in the feasts in honor of their patron saints. Suitable chapels were built in all these towns. And the missionaries furnished the chapels with holy images and pleasant sounding bells. Thus, through the cooperation of the old Christians and the civil authorities, the valley of the Agusan was being gradually transformed.

Frs. Canudas, Heras and Terricabras were sent to other places in Mindanao. Fr. Urios, after twelve years of continuous labor in the Agusan mission, was ordered to transfer to Sumilao, so that afterwards he could undertake the evangelization of numerous groups of different peoples who inhabit the shores of the Gulf of Davao. But before he left Agusan, he had the consolation of founding the town of Milagro. He wrote a beautiful letter on 28 January 1890. (*Cartas IX*, 482). We select from this letter certain points so that one will see the importance of these events:

The conquest of these people for God was not a thing of one day. It was planned from the year 1880. But they did not allow themselves to desire it until after a year of preparation. On Christmas day they were snatched from the jaws of paganism. The notorious Mancahnlay together with his people submitted to Jesus Christ.

How did Fr. Urios prepare this triumph of grace? He obtained clothing for all; he solicited the interest of the leading families of Butuan, and set out with a flotilla of eight ships, the one bearing the priest in the lead, displaying the national flag in the wind, all proceeding in perfect line.

At eleven in the morning of the fourth day we reached Milagro. What a reception that was! To me the town was transformed. The inhabitants appeared to be different people. The entire town was present to witness our disembarking with Capitan Mancahnlay presiding and with him all the town officials. Three days ago I began to baptize. This pleasant task commenced with the baptism of 115 boys and girls of various ages. On 26 [January] I baptized 127 women; yesterday I did the same for 189 men. I also blessed 75 marriages yesterday. This morning I baptized 15 more and married 3 couples, crowning my sacred tasks with an act of

great compassion when I baptized a poor leper woman in the sight of the entire town.

The first instruction of all these catechumens fell upon the shoulders of good people from Butuan. I did not have to spend many hours to get them well prepared. Now we are preparing for our return trip, during which we will gather in the harvest in the towns we will be passing through. This harvest, including Milagro, will number more or less 1000 Christians. This conclusion will crown all our labors on the lower Agusan.

After this foundation, Fr. Urios, in company with Fr. Francisco Nebot, made a visit to practically all the towns of Agusan Valley as well as the towns of the Gibong river. He also visited the Fathers in Lianga. He wrote beautiful letters about these apostolic journeys. These letters, together with those of his companion, provide us with some idea of the transformation produced by holy baptism and Christian practices in those towns built with so much labor and sacrifice. Before bidding farewell to his beloved Agusan he wrote on 6 October 1891:

While I take my leave of this region which has been watered with so much sweat and toil in order to snatch it away from the abode of death and perdition in which it had lain for so long, allow me, Reverend Father, not to conceal from you the impressions which seize my much affected spirit. For I recall the many events which happened one after another in this apostolic venture where we struggled for twelve years to make first of all human beings, and then Christians, out of the Manobo people living along the riverbanks and in the forests and mountains of the Agusan Valley.

Notwithstanding this fact, I do not know why I should feel a kind of sadness at my departure from this land. Could it be on account of the labors which it has cost me? or the hardships which came in great numbers as we gained the Agusan for Christ and for Spain, which as Your Reverence must understand, were both numerous and grievous? Suffice it to mention the many times that whole towns rose in rebellion; suffice it to recount how we followed these people in the hope that we at least could catch up with them in the midst of their swift flight. Were I to mention the crimes which evil men perpetrated against us as they invaded our Christian communities, always necessitating our intervention, to bring about peace so as to restore things to their original and satisfactory condition, it would require my writing a folio volume in order to recount everything.

Fr. Urios writes at greater length in another letter on material improvements, above all, about commerce and morals, and even the way of arranging marriages which were formerly the source and origin of innumerable assassinations.

Fr. Urios has emphasized in his letter a point worthy of note: the number of time when the natives, after they had been gathered into towns, rose up in rebellion, or organized bands of assassins.

Well known was the rebellion at Remedios¹³ and in other towns in lower Agusan at the start of the *conquista* due to the machinations of the notorious Lingcuben who was assassinated by Sagud after Commander Racaj had gone out after him. Lamentable were the consequences of the rebellions in Játiva and Moncayo in the years 1885 and 1886, and the madness that had to be endured when the town of Amparo was wiped out four times. But what was admirable and beyond the power of man was the constancy of the missionaries in putting up with their charges, in loving them and in pursuing them until they could be transformed from savage tigers into meek lambs.

When Fr. Urios left Agusan in 1891, he drew up a list of the people who had been baptized and brought together into the various towns. The list gives us an idea of the flourishing condition of the Mission. There were three residences of the missionaries: Butuan, Talacogon and Játiva.

13. Concerning the commotion in Remedios, see van Odiik, *History*, pp. 86 ff. This rebellion was triggered by the recalcitrant *bagani* Lingcuben. Even Fr. Urios was not successful in bringing him to submission. He even threatened to kill the missionaries. The trouble ended when Lingcuben was beheaded by a relative of his, Sagud, who brought the head of the famous *bagani* to Butuan where it was treated by the anthropologist Dr. Montano and brought to Paris for depositing in a museum.

BUTUAN	POPULATION	TALACOGON	POPULATION
Town of Butuan	3603	Town of Talacogon	1454
Town of Tubay	1883	Town of Veruela	620
Visita of Nasipit	499	Visita of Prosperidad	647
Reduction of Tortosa	323	Reduction of Martirez	225
Reduction of Tolosa	340	La Paz	660
Reduction of Amparo	874	Sagunto	420
Las Nieves	534	Novele	350
Esperanza	453	Asuncion	106
Remedios	286	Ebro	231
Milagro	570	Borbon	278
San Vicente	455	Las Navas	267
San Ignacio	274	Azpeitia	157
Verdu	222	Los Arcos	188
Carmen	159	San Luis	275
Santa Ana	<u>120</u>	Baza	154
	10,595	Santa Ines	310
		Guadalupe	410
JATIVA		Concordia	81
Reduction of Jativa	399	San Pedro	254
Gandia	366	San Jose	765
Compostela	334	Trento	487
Pilar	255	Tudela	425
Momayo	184	San Isidro	129
Dos Rancherias	<u>690</u>	Loreto	588
	2,228	Clavijo	118
		Gracia	136
		Concepcion	192
		Patrocinio	<u>259</u>
[GRAND TOTALS: 23,009]			10,186

[PART THREE: THE WORK OF] CONSOLIDATION

In order to improve their care of so many towns, the Jesuits obtained from the government permission to move from Bunauan to Veruela which is situated on the Agusan. As soon as that town was set in order, the missionary priest was stationed there with jurisdiction covering the villages of the Simulao, Humayan and Ihauan. Later the residences of Esperanza and Prosperidad were formed in order that the missionary priest at Esperanza could attend to the towns of the rivers Ujut, Uaua and Pusilao; and the other missionary at Prosperidad could take care of the towns formed in the valley of the Gibong. In this manner, since there were now six mission centers with one or two priests accompanied by a coadjutor brother in residence, the towns were more frequently visited. They also began seeking out those people who remained in the highlands, and in the villages of the entire Agusan Valley the practice of Christian life was diligently pursued.¹⁴

During these years these missionaries threw themselves completely into strengthening the Christian communities: Frs. Bernardino Llobera in Játiva, Ramon Ricart and Fernando Diego in Veruela, Felipe Ramo and Miguel Alaix together with the greatly mourned Fr. Sintes in Talacogon, Frs. Jose España in Prosperidad, and Francisco Nebot with Pedro Torra in Butuan. The letters written during these years give one an idea of how fruitful were the labors of these missionaries in the midst of so many sufferings inherent in their apostolic life. (*Cartas*, X.)

In a letter written on 23 July 1892, concerning Las Nieves Fr. Nebot writes:

I found them quite advanced in the catechism, and saw that the teacher was very well disposed for carrying out his duty. I heard 237 confessions, administered 20 baptisms, and blessed 4 marriages. There is an increase in population and there is reason to hope that they will continue growing in number and in piety.

Again on 1 August of the same year he reports: "I heard 125 confessions in Amparo"; and during the fiesta in the next year [1893], he distributed 117 communions, and 20 of those who received did so for the first time.

14. During the years 1890 to 1899 the Jesuits made 30,000 conversions and founded 87 villages. (van Odiijk, *History*, p. 158).

Fr. Nebot writes about the town of Esperanza (p. 343): "Attendance at sermons has been greater than in previous years; and in three days I heard the same number of confessions which I had heard in all the other years in four." Then after a full month of apostolic travel he wrote to Fr. Ricart (p. 354): "I returned quite satisfied with the progress of these villages. I am certain that the towns of the old Christians, if they had no more means of civilization than these reductions, would soon be at the same level of culture as they or even inferior.

But it was not only Fr. Nebot who gained these results in the lower Agusan. On page 402 Fr. Felipe Ramo says this of Guadalupe:

On the first day that I decided to hear confessions, there were 125 penitents, then all the others followed until every one in Guadalupe went to confession. The confessions were followed by general communion and baptisms. I gave communion for the first time to many boys and girls prepared by Isidro and Roberta, the teachers of the town and in whom I have great hopes.

In San Luis he heard 62 confessions and in Santa Ines 135, and distributed 87 communions.

Fr. Miguel Alaix conducted short missions in the *visitas* and reductions and preached to the Manobo three times a day with abundant fruit. Fr. Ricart wrote (*History*, 3:102).

There is much hope in the children and youth who in no way believe, in fact detest in their hearts and in their deeds, the deceits of the devil. How well they attend holy Mass! With what devotion they recite the holy Rosary in church! How well and with what delight they confess their sins!

IMPRISONMENT OF THE FATHERS - THE REVOLUTION

The events in Luzon perpetrated against Spanish sovereignty in the archipelago had their repercussions in Agusan.¹⁵ On 17

15. Concerning the happenings in Surigao during these days, we know that in Butuan on 22 December 1898 the Commandante Politico-Militar left for Manila and appointed Juan Atega as interim governor since he had been *gobernadorcillo*. When Fr. Nebot inquired which flag should be hoisted, the American or Aguinaldo's, it was decided to raise instead the papal flag. So from December 1898 until the coming of Wenceslao Gonzalez in March 1899 the papal white and yellow was displayed over the public buildings in Butuan, a decision warmly welcomed by all (van Odiijk, *History*, p. 158). In Surigao the interim Provincial Board was elected with Fr. Alberto Masoliver, S.J. as the Chairman.

January 1899 Wenceslao Gonzales¹⁶ who had been named the Governor of Surigao appeared in Butuan. As soon as he arrived, he went directly to the convento and declared all the Fathers and Brothers of Agusan prisoners of war. The mournful scenes

At the same time Juan Gonzalez was elected governor. In Misamis Oriental, before the departure of the Spaniards, the people organized the new government; four provincial officials formed the Provincial Council presided over by the Provincial President. These were Hon. Jose Roa y Casas, Provincial President; Hon. Manuel Corrales, Counselor of Peace and Order; Hon. Pio Roa y Alcalá, Counselor of Judiciary and Registry of Deeds; and Hon. Ramon Neri y Abejuela, Counselor of Internal Revenue and Real Estates. See Filomeno Bautista, *The Bautista Manuscript on the Philippine Revolution in Misamis Province, 1900-1901*, ed. Francis C. Madigan, S.J. and others (Cagayan de Oro: Xavier University, 1968), pp. 19 and 52 n. 14). See also Leo A. Cullum, S.J., "Notes on the Revolution in Surigao," *Philippine Studies* 9 (1961): 488-94.

16. Wenceslao Gonzalez and his elder brother Simon were the two persons who made the lives of the Agusan and Surigao missionaries, Jesuits and Benedictines, quite miserable during the Revolution. They were sons of the Provincial Governor of Surigao, Juan Gonzalez. Sometime in April 1898 both Simon and Wenceslao had been ordered by the Spanish Governor to go to Manila, most probably because of involvement in political ferment against Spain. Both seemed to have been members of Freemasonry. An elder brother of theirs, Florencio by name, earlier in the same month had been killed in an uprising against Spain in Cebu. This seems to have embittered the brothers against Spain and particularly against priests. Meanwhile the war between Spain and the United States broke out. The brothers did not reach Manila. They were detained in Iloilo but under Spanish surveillance. In September they obtained permission to go to Hongkong. On 13 August 1898 Manila fell into the hands of the combined Filipino and American forces. When the brothers returned to Manila they made contact with the revolutionary government of Malolos and it was there that Simon received his appointment "as provisional military commander in the Island of Mindanao with powers to recruit and organize troops on the said island . . ." It is not clear what authority Wenceslao had been vested with.

When the brothers returned to Surigao on 12 March 1899, they took over the government, supplanting thereby the duly elected and interim Provincial Council. Simon then went to the *convento* and informed Frs. Masoliver and Ignacio Villa and a coadjutor brother that they were now prisoners of war and were under house arrest. Meanwhile Wenceslao went to Butuan. There he introduced himself as the Governor of Surigao District and Colonel of the Cavalry, wearing red trousers, a sabre and a gun. He had the papal flag brought down and in its place hoisted the Filipino flag. Then he informed the Jesuits that they too were under arrest and after a while should report to Surigao. The imprisonment of the Jesuits and Benedictines in Surigao lasted 72 days. They were liberated by Prudencio Garcia, head of the Filipino forces in Baganga who had led an uprising against the Spanish authorities and was therefore a power to reckon with in the south. Because he had the men and the guns, he easily despoiled the Gonzalez brothers of their authority, legitimate as well as pretended. Garcia was known for his moderation and respect for humanity and for the ministers of religion. The two brothers were taken prisoner and somewhere on the beach in Cortes they were shot. Of the two brothers Simon was less brutal. For a fuller account cf. van Odiijk, *History*, pp. 158-62; also Ricardo Romero, OSB, *Historia con Visos de Novela de la Nuestra Prision en Surigao* (Barcelona, 1903) and Cullum, "Revolution in Surigao," pp. 488-94. In connection with Fr. Francisco Sanchez and his successful flight from the Gonzalez brothers who had plans to kill him, see Leo A. Cullum, S.J., "Francisco de Paula Sanchez, 1849-1928," *Philippine Studies* 8 (1960): 334-55.

which transpired in different towns when their beloved missionaries departed make clear how badly these people felt when they found themselves deprived of the presence of those who had nurtured them in the faith. It is good to put down here the names of these heroic missionaries. At that time in Butuan were residing Frs. Nebot, Casellas and Foradada¹⁷ (the latter recovering from fever), together with Bro. Beltran.¹⁸ In Esperanza on the 22 [January 1899] Fr. Ramon Ricart and Bro. Juan Costa were detained; in Talacogon on 25 January Fr. Alaix with Bros. Luis Ferreros and Pedro Simon; on 2 February in Prosperidad Fr. Jose España and Bro. Francisco Mompo; and, on 12 [February] Fr. Fernando Diego and Bro. Miguel Sureda were detained in Veruela, and on the 18th Fr. Bernardino Llobera in Játiva.

One cannot read with dry eyes of the spectacles of sorrow in the towns when the people beheld the missionaries leaving the Agusan Valley escorted by soldiers, especially those described by Frs. Alaix, Nebot and Diego (*History*, 3: 359, 362, 364).

One should take special note, in praise of those people, that except for those commissioned and those who had arrogated to themselves the honors of Governor [of Surigao] and General [of Mindanao], the people did not participate in despoiling the goods in the houses of the missionaries. The *principalia* of Talacogon and Veruela distinguished themselves in their fidelity and in their expressed desire for the return of the missionaries.

All [the Fathers of the Agusan mission] were brought to Butuan and from there to Surigao, except one priest whom the Butuanon desired to retain in order that they be not deprived altogether of spiritual help. They chose Fr. Fernando Diego. This Father passed through many difficulties during his detention as prisoner, and he was not left sufficient freedom to accomplish the missionary task. Two times he left Butuan in order to visit the towns of the river-

17. Fr. Foradada was the parish priest of Esperanza.

18. Van Odijk (p. 159) mentions that there were actually five Jesuits in Butuan whom Wenceslao Gonzalez declared prisoners of war. The fifth Jesuit was Bro. Auger. As to the exact number of religious, Jesuits and Benedictines, who were imprisoned in Surigao we do not exactly know. At one time there were twenty-four altogether: twelve Jesuits: seven priests and five brothers; and twelve Benedictines: seven priests and five brothers; later on three more Jesuits arrived from Agusan (Romero *Historia*, p. 104).

However, we know that there were forty-one Jesuits from Mindanao who on 31 March 1899 left Zamboanga at 6 P.M., on board the steamer *Puerto Rico*, bound for Manila, with Fr. Gregorio Parache as their superior and Captain Inspector Don Adolfo Chaquer in command. See Cullum, "Sanchez," p. 355.

banks of the Agusan. He noticed what he had feared would happen among those newly formed Christian communities: the disappearance of the various reductions, the number of planned assassinations, the return to their Manobo customs and the lack of instruction. Fr. Diego was replaced by Fr. Bernardino Llobera. The former left Butuan at the mouth of the Agusan on 5 June 1900.

As soon as the [political] horizons of the Philippines quieted down the Fathers returned at once to Mindanao. Fr. Juan Heras arrived in Butuan towards the close of 1900 and Fr. Saturnino Urios began his second phase as "Apostle of Agusan," acting as peacemaker between the Butuanon and the Americans who had entered the town on 28 January. Concerning the intervention of Fr. Urios and the esteem he gained among the Americans for his services as an angel of peace, [the American] Lt. Col. Comte wrote a letter from Butuan to Fr. Pio Pi, [Superior of the Mission] on 23 April 1901 (*History*, 3:434). He says:

Sir, I wish to express my debt of gratitude to the Jesuit, Fr. Saturnino Urios, a missionary of this place, for his services as interpreter and intermediary between my office and the natives. He has been tireless in his good offices, using his influence with the rebel chieftains Flores, Toribio and Andres Atega that they might surrender and return to peaceful occupations. He has used his personal influence principally in the interest of the American government. He has shown to the town the advantages they will gain in commerce and general prosperity.

I hope an opportunity will present itself so that I can show in a more practical manner our gratitude to the said Reverend Father.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant.

[PART FOUR] LABORS DURING THE AMERICAN RULE: 1901-1935

How different has been the influence of the Spanish missionaries during the American rule from the influence they exerted under the Spanish government in the matter of catechizing, formation and spiritual care of Christianity in Agusan! The separation of Church and State, the establishment of secular public schools¹⁹ and co-education, the introduction of luxury into the

19. Fr. Vrakking in his Postscript to van Odijk's *History*, pp. 164 ff., points out more clearly the deleterious effect of Freemasonry on the Catholic schools in Butuan and Surigao and in the whole Philippines.

families, the immigration of people from other provinces, the unfortunate Aglipayan schism and the Protestant sects have changed the face of the Agusan region.

Of the six residences²⁰ we had in the valley in the beginning, only that of Butuan was reopened. Later in 1903 the residence in Talacogon was also opened. In 1904 a priest and a brother arrived for Jabonga which later in 1913 was transferred to Cabadbaran. There was a plan to establish residences again in Veruela and Játiva, but it was not carried out, nor in Esperanza or in Prosperidad.

Ordinarily there were only five priests: two in Butuan, two in Talacogon and one in Cabadbaran, with a coadjutor brother in each residence.

From the very beginning in order to counteract the bad influence of the public schools, a parochial school for boys was opened while the religious of the Beaterio directed the school for girls and formed the youth in piety.

Fr. Urios, now that he could no longer seek out the pagans, gave himself to the spiritual formation of the Butuanon. He fostered piety through the Apostleship of Prayer, the Sodalities of the Children of Mary, of the Young Men, and of a Happy Death. He also conducted various courses of the Spiritual Exercises in strict silence, and he often visited the towns along the Bay [of Butuan], above all, Cabadbaran and Tubay where, especially in the former, he did great damage to the Aglipayan schism.

The Fathers of Talacogon went on continual missions, going from village to village as far as Compostela, including in their jurisdiction all the territory that before had belonged to Prosperidad, Játiva, Veruela and Talacogon. All the missionaries of this second epoch, and especially the priests at Talacogon, deserve everlasting remembrance. They were unknown heroes because of the numberless trials they suffered for months and years: riding in small barotos, sleeping in dilapidated lodging, and putting up with discouragement because of the lack of necessary assistance; they were ill-fed, frequently attacked by fever. Worst of all, they suffered all this at a time when they were witnessing the Aglipayan schism, introduced by peddlers bereft of inner feelings, spreading through the

20. van Odijk writes that in 1899 Agusan had seven places with resident priests: Butuan, Esperanza, Prosperidad, Talacogon, Veruela, Jativa, and Mainit. *History*, p. 158.

towns of the Simulao, and Catholic practices being dropped by those who should be giving example to the new Christians.

In Talacogon resided Fr. Francisco Nebot and Fr. Salvador Viñas who arrived in 1904 and died, consumed by fever, on 22 December 1908. Fr. Salvador Giralt who was later named Procurator in 1912 was also stationed there. But above all there were Frs. Cristobal Sastre and Ignacio Vila who for the space of long years with debilitated strength cared for that Christian community until the transfer of the mission.

After the death of Fr. Saturnino Urios in Manila on 26 October 1916, he was succeeded by the energetic Fr. Jose Rius. But the damp climate was bad for his health and he was transferred to Davao. And so Butuan was served by Fr. Jose Buxo as parish priest until its transfer. Fr. Buxó was loved by all his parishioners.

From the opening of the residence of Cabadbaran (1913), Fr. Jose España was at the head of that difficult mission. He was respected by both good and evil men, for he was a man capable of great undertakings. But when his strength was exhausted, he had to leave the Philippines in search of his lost health which he failed to find even in his own native land. A few months afterwards he died the death of the just in Sarria, [Spain]. In 1926 Fr. Juan Costa arrived in Cabadbaran. Until his death, which occurred on 19 June 1934, he won the good will, even of many Aglipayan who loved him for his zeal and his energy.

Nothing has been said of the [financial] sacrifices of the Society of Jesus for this region of Agusan. The parish houses and churches which have been constructed, the sacred vestments, the statues and bells of the various towns and the edifice which houses the religious Sisters in Butuan are a sample of the alms secured for the purpose of helping in a spiritual way the inhabitants of Agusan.

Finally when the Fathers of the Sacred Heart received [from the Jesuits] the Catholic schools in Butuan which had been approved [by the government] these schools were then flourishing and living a life of their own. Thanks to the vigilant attention of Frs. Buxó and Costa the associations of the Sacred Heart, the Sodalities of Our Lady, frequent even daily communion, monthly recollections and yearly retreats in the mission centers of Butuan, Cabadbaran and Buenavista, were also thriving. This missionary activity would have been extended to other centers of population

as soon as frequent visitations were made easier by improved communication from one part [of the valley] to the other.

How changed indeed is Agusan! From the beginning until the years 1917 or 1918, travel by water was the only means of transport. On the various tributaries of the Agusan only the pole handled by robust men could move the small boats forward. There were no launches on the Agusan, nor were there automobiles plying between Cabadbaran, Butuan, Buenavista and Nasipit. The great problem and moral affliction was the lack of needed help. Now all that has been made easier.

May the present missionaries rejoice over these advantages, and with the increase of missionary priests and the opening of many more residences all over the valley, may they finish the conversion of the ten thousand pagans still living in this region.